The incomprehensible term of human transcendence, which takes place in man’s existentiell and original being and not only in theoretical or merely conceptual reflection, is called God, and he communicates himself in forgiving love to man both existentielly and historically as man’s own fulfillment. The eschatological climax of God’s historical self-communication, in which this self-communication becomes manifest as irreversible and victorious, is called Jesus Christ.\(^2\)

When we speak of Karl Rahner, we must keep in mind that although he was one of the most prominent theologians the world has witnessed, he was just a simple follower of Jesus. It might even be said that he himself would have uttered something like this, a man of brilliant and insightful theological movements and ideas, yet increasingly humble all the same. What can we learn from a man like Rahner, who in his lifetime amassed an enormous and prolific amount of theological and philosophical writings?

This paper will focus on Rahner’s viewpoints on salvation, salvation’s intrinsic link to human history, and the implications all of these ideas have for the history and life of the world. This topic will require research in the areas of anthropology and our essential relationship to the Almighty. What type of relationship is it? How can we understand it via our daily lives today? How does it assist in fundamentally explaining our intimate and often tangible bond with Jesus Christ, the bringer of salvation and the illuminator of the world? Furthermore, this essay will address Rahner’s opinion on the extent of God’s ultimate salvation: can only Christians receive God’s all-encompassing and ever-present grace, or does God open God’s heart to a world full of strife, hardship, poverty, and disbelief?

These extremely difficult questions address what it means to be a Christian and what is to come in the next life. Karl Rahner offers us some wonderful interpretations of a faith that is often misinterpreted or disavowed. Moreover, he extends to the ordinary Christian a chance to see what life has to offer, a life that God has given us in an extraordinary sacrifice, and which God reminds us we have the right to participate in, here, now, and in the next life as well. Let us explore these questions below, and attempt a clear interpretation of the elusive mystery that places the divine at the center of our lives.

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Relationship Between Humans and the Divine

Before we can successfully delve into Rahner’s take on salvation, we must cover the specific relationship that humanity finds itself in with the divine, a relationship that parallels the message of salvation and that message’s relationship to the history of humankind. This former relationship particularly emphasizes the “transcendental element” within humans, a term Rahner borrows from such philosophers as Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger. But what exactly is this transcendental nature, that is inherently hidden within humanity and spiritually grounded in its very being?

Within his *tour de force*, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Rahner asserts that “transcendental experience [is] the subjective, unthematic, necessary and unfailing consciousness of the knowing subject that is co-present in every spiritual act of knowledge, and the subject’s openness to the unlimited expanse of all possible reality.”³ And if we borrow language from Ronald Modras, we can see how Rahner combines his philosophical approach with the anthropology of humanity, specifically in relation to the divine presence of God:

In reflecting upon our questioning and upon ourselves as questioning beings, we discover that we not only apprehend individual objects but in that act “pre-apprehend” or, better, reach out toward an infinite horizon of being, so that we are already “with being in its totality.” This power to reach out (Vorgriff) constitutes our essential nature as spiritual or transcendent beings. Rahner maintained that fundamental concept unchanged except for his further elaboration within the framework of Christian faith, whereby the absolute being of metaphysics becomes the absolute mystery that surrounds our lives. Spirituality means that we live our lives reaching out towards the absolute mystery that is God.⁴

As we explore this notion of the transcendent nature of the human being, we see that we are ever-venturing creatures, soaked like a sponge in divine presence, with only God asking us to pry ever deeper into what Rahner labels the *holy mystery*, which is the Almighty Itself. This being said, we have to consider that humanity, indeed, finds itself in a specific relationship with the divine, a relationship of sheer uncertainty. As William V. Dych writes,

> What are the limits of this transcendence, what is its term, what do we touch when we reach beyond ourselves in knowledge, freedom and love? This transcendence can be experienced as unlimited, as an openness which is unbounded and open in an absolute sense. We can use the image of a horizon to express this: our experience of the finite world opens us to a horizon which ever recedes as we move through the finite; there is always a “more” to be known and to be loved and to be lived. We are aware of it, but can never reach it; it is there but it ever exceeds our grasp.⁵

If, for example, we consider God’s love from the above-mentioned quotation, we can grasp what Dych is depicting when he talks about the incomprehensible mystery of God: God’s love is ever-present, ever-powerful, and always plenteous in our lives, but we only sense this amazing feeling to a certain and determinate point. Rahner suggests that the *holy mystery*, God, is infinite in possibility, infinite in time and space, and therefore infinite in love. Yet we never give up that right to search for it, and to keep asking profound questions about it. It is in our very nature, as God has always intended it to be.

It is this very nature of a transcendental experience of the human being that Rahner considers normal and routine. He believes that we have the capacity ever to push our boundaries of the “infinite horizon,” a horizon which

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ebbs and flows with our very being. It is not an exception to say that people of God are the only beings who possess the mental fortitude to experience the mystery that is life. Rahner wants to stress that our lived human experience is very much a part of that transcendental mystery, and “that [human existence] reaches beyond the finite world, that humanity can be known and loved by what is beyond that world, and can therefore know and love in return.”

If we further probe Rahner’s mystery of the human being, almost branded as an entity that he labels with two distinct sets of functions within the finite and infinite worlds, we see that it falls back on his theory of transcendentalism (with specific reference to humankind’s innermost crevices of the heart, mind, and soul). Rahner considers the human being both person and subject. “Person,” in Rahner’s mind, describes “the self-possession of a subject as such in a conscious and free relationship to the totality of itself.” Thus, human beings are constantly looking into past events, while ever fixated on the future. The “personhood” of a human being takes into account that we, as people of God and of this earth, are very much able to “understand and respond.” What we particularly comprehend and answer to is another story, as the world offers countless distractions for this very purpose. However, within the context of Rahner’s anthropology, we must consider this a call toward something bigger than ourselves, something divine, and someone whom we label as God.

When we take account of the “subjective” nature of the human being, we add a new variable to the equation: “In the fact that man raises analytical questions about himself and opens himself to the unlimited horizons of such questioning, he has already transcended himself and every conceivable element of such an analysis or of an empirical reconstruction of himself.” Therefore, as mentioned, “The power of radical questioning, which is not so much something we have as it is that which we are, is the meaning of subjectivity. In the experience of confronting the self as a whole, we go beyond every partial knowledge, no matter how sophisticated that particular knowledge may be.” Looking at this from another angle, we can connect Rahner’s large schematic of transcendence and its interconnectivity with the human being, which we will refer to over the remainder of this section:

The human person is: (i) Hearer of the Message; (ii) someone who finds himself in the presence of Absolute Mystery; (iii) a being ‘radically threatened by guilt’...(iv) ‘Man as the Event of God’s Free and Forgiving Self-Communication.’ God’s self-communication is God’s self-donation, not a word about God, but God giving God-self. Rahner discusses the interrelated determinations that must be considered as part of ‘true personhood’: human transcendence; responsibility and freedom; the orientation of the person toward incomprehensible mystery; human being ‘in history and the world’; human sociality.

Thus far this section has demonstrated how the human being, both as person and subject, is more or less oriented toward a solicitation of incomprehensible meanings and elucidations. How does humanity afford itself the opportunity to take advantage of self-confrontation and self-responsibility, the true definition of what it means to be a person and subject of transcendent being? Within this transcendent reality, is God simply there? In our ordinary and mundane lives, how does one experience the transcendent? How does one grasp the holy mystery? How does one discover God? We have to consider these questions if we are to understand how we, as humans

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6 Dych, “Theology in a New Key,” 10.
aligned toward the divine, are to function in a world that appears to proclaim God as something “fun-loving” and picturesque—around, but not truly in our midst. Rahner helps dispel the argument that God is irrelevant, positing God as One who has made an intrinsic link between his divine offering of grace and salvation and our own human journeys throughout the centuries.

We must try to understand that although this transcendental awareness of God within us is often inconceivable to our “human” nature, it permeates us through and through. It is as though it lives deep inside us, stirring our emotions without ever taking credit, or demanding any. As Anne E. Carr asserts,

> [Transcendence] is, rather, the openness to being which is always present and which we always are, within all the projects and plans, hopes and fears of our ordinary lives. It is that origin and background of our lives over which we have no control, a kind of question mark which is always present. For the experience of transcendence can never be pinned down adequately in conceptual language...yet there is no other way to bring such immediate experience to reflective awareness than through the mediation of words and concepts which can distort the very experience they are meant to signify. Thus such experience can be overlooked, ignored, avoided. But it remains as the “secret ingredient,” the horizon of mystery which is always present to us and which constitutes us as persons.\(^\text{13}\)

If we cannot directly capture this transcendental mindfulness within us, an awareness that opens us up to God and intricately links us to the world, there must be a way to experience it indirectly. Rahner introduces the categorical human experience, which we employ on a daily basis, and which inherently works together with the transcendental element within us to produce the larger dimension of the entire human experience of God and the world God created. James J. Bacik describes categorical experience as “always the historical self-interpretation of the transcendental experience, which is itself the actuation of the being of a person”\(^\text{14}\) or “the dimension of reflected, articulated, conceptualized experience.”\(^\text{15}\) What Rahner and Bacik are describing is a distinction between how we bring about clarity of certain subjects, topics, illustrations, occurrences, etc. within the world, and the deeper, almost cryptic meaning behind all of them.

While we may accentuate certain events within our lives for the sake of comprehension, we must always be aware of that inner nature which is less often discussed, let alone analyzed. Bacik reminds us again that “The transcendental and the categorical are necessarily and essentially related, and healthy self-experience involves a continuing interaction between them. Reflexive consciousness without its transcendental grounding withers; transcendental awareness without its objectification is blind.”\(^\text{16}\) Thus, the categorical experience is important if we are to talk about what makes us human beings in the first place. It puts into perspective a certain dialectic between what can be seen and what is shrouded in mystery. If we are to uncover our identities as human beings, we must be ever-enlightened by the exploration and acceptance of our categorical or “objectified” experiences, which all the more enhance our transcendental, hidden, and “unthematic” experiences.

Now that we have discussed Rahner’s schematic regarding his anthropology of humanity and the internal/external dimensions of physical experience, we will examine why such an anthropology was necessary, and move into the conversation surrounding absolute freedom and responsibility within the human-divine milieu.

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\(^{13}\) Carr, “Starting with the Human,” 22.
\(^{15}\) Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*, 22.
\(^{16}\) Bacik, *Apologetics and the Eclipse of Mystery*, 23.
Making the Connection Between Experience and Gift

According to Rahner, we live in a world constantly bombarded by questions: What is the meaning of life? Has God played a role throughout the course of our lives? Has the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ truly affected the lives of humans since? These questions present the idea of humanity’s “essential being [as] something which is always historically constituted, and thus as existing in confrontation with Christianity as grace and as historical message.”\(^\text{17}\) They also point to the fact that Christianity is a “revealed theology,” disclosed “to man so that this essential being of his, which is inescapable and is always historically oriented, does not remain hidden from him.”\(^\text{18}\)

These deep and often unanswered questions are not only present within a particular individual at a particular time during his/her life; they have been and always will be at the center of the transcendental element which pervades the human race. The fact that Christianity has entered the immediate human atmosphere is God-given, but the truth of the matter lies in the difficult decision to follow the message of Christ and hold onto it through the power of our transcendent “yes!”

Rahner, writing on transcendence, also explores the notion of freedom outside of its use in common parlance. He views freedom as the way in which we all benefit from a certain authenticity to ourselves, a level of genuineness that exhibits our true intentions and extends from our deep human longings. As Rahner describes it, “We can only say, then, that because and insofar as I experience myself as person and as subject, I also experience myself as free, as free in a freedom which does not refer primarily to an individual, isolated psychic occurrence, but in a freedom which refers to the subject as one and as a whole in the unity of its entire actualization of existence.”\(^\text{19}\)

Freedom cannot be measured in what we label “free will.” It depends upon our willingness for our inner selves to see the creativity God has bestowed upon each and every one of us, with our particular gifts, talents, and functions for the world. As Rahner concludes, “freedom always concerns the person as such and as a whole...When freedom is really understood, it is not the power to be able to do this or that, but the power to decide about oneself and to actualize oneself.”\(^\text{20}\)

So how do we “actualize” ourselves toward the divine? How do we commit to saying “yes,” not just to our transcendental awareness, but to the idea of God, Jesus Christ and his mission, salvation, redemption, etc.? In order to align ourselves toward the indescribable, absolute mystery, we have to be able to commit to these hard-to-grasp and hard-to-swallow concepts. As Bacik explains, “Sometimes we find ourselves assailed by doubts and are moved to seek answers. On other occasions we are prompted to question by a certain wonder or amazement in the face of reality. Whatever the precise cause of our spirit of inquiry, we do experience ourselves as never totally satisfied by the particular knowledge we acquire.”\(^\text{21}\)

These “doubts” are not easy to digest, but they are ever-present in our history. As Rahner writes, “Real transcendence is always in the background, so to speak, in those origins of human life and human knowledge over which we have no control.”\(^\text{22}\) Hence, we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell the essence, example, and goodness of God in and throughout the world in which we live. “We have been considering God up to now as the creative

\(^{17}\) Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, 24-25.
^{19}\) Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, 38.
^{22}\) Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, 35.
ground of everything which can encounter us within the ultimate horizon which he himself is and which he alone forms.”

The absolute mystery will always be a mystery, one to which we will never be fully privy, but it is a mystery that we experience every day, in our most basic activities. It has been stated that people find God—experience the divine—in the most mundane and ordinary things. This comes to fruition through the very essence of God’s contribution to humanity: God’s self.

Rahner expounds this in much more detail throughout various works, but suffice it to say that “God does not lose God’s infinite reality and absolute mystery [in the creation of humankind]…Consequently, there is still a distance between God and the creature, but at the same time—consistent with Rahner’s Ignatian sensibility—God can be found everywhere in everyday reality.” Moreover, and to fall back upon the fundamentals of human existence, we say that “man experiences himself as a finite, categorical existent, as established in his difference from God by absolute being, as an existent coming from absolute being and grounded in absolute mystery. The fact that he has his origin permanently in God and the fact that he is radically different from God are in their unity and mutually conditioning relationship fundamental existentials of man.”

Therefore, humanity is totally dependent upon God, who has given God’s own self in order to profoundly effect a mental disposition of longing within God’s creation. This self-giving, or as Rahner calls it, “self-communication,” stipulates “that God can communicate himself in his own reality to what is not divine without ceasing to be infinite reality and absolute mystery, and without man ceasing to be a finite existent different from God.” The divine reality is what creates our relationship in the first place; it is also what sustains our relationship through life’s trials and tribulations. No longer are we dependent upon our internal, limited, and self-centered conscious-nesses for discovering that which is incomprehensible. If we are true “hearers of the word,” we are radically inclined only because God makes this possible through God’s divine grace within the world and within us, the human entity.

Whereas one question implores a solution, Rahner deliberately brings up another, this time concentrating on the phenomenon of grace and what role it plays within our human lives. Thus the question becomes, are we prepared to direct our inner subjectivity toward the full assimilation of the divine gift of God’s self, God’s Word, and God’s Spirit?

If we look at the origins of the word, we might notice that “grace” is attributed to the Latin *gratia*, or even *gratus*, a word that can be translated as “favor, both that in which one stands with others and that which one shows to others.” Therefore, the “favor” that God grants us all is a gift of free acceptance. If we combine this notion of God’s “favor” with the notion of our human freedom to be authentic to ourselves, we have developed a possible formula for entertaining such grace.

Rahner mentions grace in the following way: “This is what is expressed in the Christian doctrine which says that in grace, that is, in the communication of God’s Holy Spirit, the event of immediacy to God as man’s fulfillment is prepared for in such a way that we must say of man here and now that he participates in God’s being; that he has been given the divine Spirit who fathoms the depths of God; that he is already God’s son here and now, and

what he already is must only become manifest.”28 Thus, God is the architect, Jesus is the master builder, the Spirit is the vehicle, and nature is the road by which we all live to experience the wholly “self-communicative” mystery, which seeks to enter each and every one of our hearts.

Rahner states explicitly that we are truly God’s creation (sons and daughters), in which God entrusts God’s own conscious breath of life and vitality. And we are truly special in realizing this gift, this grace, which is offered to no other kingdom, order, species, or specimen. As George Vandervelde reiterates on the holy relationship that exists between God and humankind, and the difference God maintains and/or distinguishes between humanity and nature:

In distinction from grace as God’s self-communication, nature comes into being when God creates other-than-self. Rahner calls the distinction between nature and the supernatural ‘essential and radical.’ He contrasts the two realities as involving two different types of causality. Nature results from a unique (divine) mode of efficient causality by which God constitutes something wholly other than self, creates the nondivine. Grace on the other hand, is a special instance of formal causality. By speaking of formal causality, Rahner indicates that grace does not effect a new reality but fundamentally affects existent reality. In grace God imparts God’s inner being as form of created reality, thus becoming its destiny and end.29

And so the fundamental response to God’s grace is what? What are we to do in light of this wonderful, awesome, life-changing opportunity? God not only provides us with the answers inherent to life’s course, but the Spirit guides us and shows us the true path of becoming and living as a follower of Christ. If we take another look at the definition of gratia, we will notice that it can also signify “thanks (by word or deed), thankfulness, gratitude, acknowledgement, return, requital…”30 It is within our Christian lives to be constantly aware, and, if not so already, become aware of the wonderful things that God has put before us. And while Vandervelde makes clear the distinction between Rahner’s divine description of efficient and formal causality, we are in no less a position on the receiving end. Not only can we provide our Lord with “acknowledgement” throughout the day, we can celebrate God’s sacrifice in Christ at the breaking of the bread (the altar of life, the true berakhah of God’s wondrous and plentiful deeds).

Where does all of this talk of grace, God’s essential, self-directed, and explicit gift, come into play? What does it all mean in terms of salvation, a salvation that lasts throughout the history of the world? In the subsequent section, we will tackle this issue, focusing on the interconnectivity of humanity’s external/physical passage through time and the essential elements of God’s saving plan.

An Uncommon Communion?

This section has been labeled so with the very intention of refutation in the following pages. This must be said, and we must all be witnesses to the fact that Rahner has enlightened us in providing an unparalleled look at the depths of Christianity’s most treasured and often misunderstood concepts. He finds a way not only to provide the erudition one expects from such a scholar, but to rework intricately his ideas and formulations in a way that seems almost poetic. We find further evidence of this in this section, which will focus on the parallelism that exists between the everyday, common world in which we live (Vandervelde’s “nondive,” etc.) and what

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28 Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, 120.
Rahner calls “the event of the free, unmerited and forgiving self-communication of God in absolute closeness and immediacy.”

If we choose God, if we choose to pursue the holy mystery that is growing ever closer, we do not do so in an instant, or on a one-time basis. The history of time and space occurs over years, centuries, even millennia. After all, “Christianity speaks of birth and generation in the Trinity; son and Spirit are on missions to us, are sent into our history and our psyches. And so it is not surprising that our human life and God’s presence in it is a history.”

We witness God’s gift, God’s grace, God’s capacity to welcome us into God’s bosom, as one continuous yet separate event over the course of our often profane and opaque human history. As Thomas F. O’Meara observes,

Salvation history is not simply a few biblical stories about Abraham and Moses and Jesus; it is the very history of the world rooted in and completed by God’s Word made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. God, because God is love and wills to save all, has graciously embraced the whole of human history. God’s grace and justification have been concretely and historically realized in human history. For the believer the history of the world is a history of grace. What seems to be an endless stream of blood and sweat has a meaning because beneath and within it is the expanding power of God’s presence. The history of the world seems to dominate, to have the last word and to dictate the terms for all of our lives. But in fact the history of the world does not have the final word for us. The history of grace is the ultimate history, the final and most valuable story.

Our lives are interconnected with that of the divine. God has created this life for us, and the act of us living it creates a common interaction between us. The fact that the Word and Holy Spirit dwell with us and guide us is no coincidence; we are to take advantage of this “history of grace” as God has offered us favor within the world (gratia). And like the Trinitarian relationship that O’Meara mentions above, we, as humans, are also meant to be in relationship.

The freedom of authenticity is one of humanity’s most important ideals. If we are true to ourselves, we realize that inner dimension (transcendence), a dimension engulfed in love and right relationship. Therefore, the teachings Jesus set forth nearly two-thousand years ago have lingering, profound, and far-reaching potential for us all. His example of love, of inclusion, of an authentic humanity, has afforded us a task, a particular responsibility to carry out διακονία in his name. If Jesus “is our climax in religious history,” intensified in his ability to witness both sides of the divine-human equation, an equation which sets about in the most “personal intensification of God’s presence,” we are then called to believe that “Jesus is the key example of the human religious situation; the successful union of the passionate love of God and the religious quest of all of us.”

Similarly, Rahner states that “the history of revelation [encompassing our salvation history in the transcendent reality that God was, is, and always will be present] has its absolute climax when God’s self-communication reaches its unsurpassable high point through the hypostatic union and in the incarnation of God in the created, spiritual reality of Jesus for his own sake, and hence for the sake of all of us.”

In light of all of this, we are truly in the presence of greatness! Few Christians, few believers, sincerely take advantage of this miraculous offer God has bestowed upon the human race throughout the history of the world.

Yes, we are constantly surrounded by a history of salvation and revelation, a history which fosters and encourages us through God’s self-communication toward a certain union of trust, fellowship, and αγάπη. Without love, we are nothing; without the actualization of Jesus’ sacrifice, we are blind to this archetypical example of divine charity that has walked alongside us since the beginning of time.

This essay has focused not only on salvation as intrinsically in the world, but on the transfigured essence of humankind toward the divine. We have offered a relatively universal outlook on the outpouring of God’s grace, but what are the specifics that Rahner posits, especially concerning the availability of salvation? Can all non-Christian religions perceive this notion of salvation through the veil of different belief systems, creeds, practices, customs, and deities? If we had to put a more succinct emphasis on this type of question, what hope does God offer for those not of the Christian faith?

Salvation for All, Yes or No?

If God freely gives us God’s gratia, are we to believe that God cannot also save us? A God who is all, who creates all, and who subsumes all, certainly would have the power and the obligation to save all. But is there a responsibility on the part of humanity to deliver a certain response to God’s self-communication? And what exactly is God saving us from? Of what does salvation consist? David Tracy describes salvation more as a process than a singular incident:

It is, first, an experience of release from some powerful bondage: a release from guilt by the forgiveness of sin, a release from the bondage of an anxious sense of radical transience, from anxiety in the face of death, from anxiety in the face of the seeming meaninglessness or absurdity of existence... The experience is, at the same time, an experience of releasement to some new way of existing as an authentic human being: an experience of freedom...to accept the created world and one’s own finitude as essentially good; the freedom to accept the fact of our own acceptance by God despite sin and guilt; the freedom to face death as not the final word...the freedom to accept experiences of peace, joy, and understanding as manifestations, however fragmentary, of the presence of ultimate reality itself.37

However wonderful this soteriological assessment might be, it does not answer the question of how far this particular dogma might reach. What it does offer us, again, is the universality of grace, the gift that keeps on giving and upon which we rely to align ourselves to the positive message of Christ. While the Church’s official and somewhat impervious stance is set forth in its “Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions,” it does not offer a prolific amount of literature on the subject. And whereas the antiquated dictum, “extra Ecclesiam nulla salus,” enters the conversation now and again, the Church does find substantial and deep meaning within the world’s myriad religious institutions.

As the above-mentioned document states, “The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these [other] religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.”38 Naturally, Rahner sheds a particular light on the situation of Christianity as the best example of a salvific promise that is carried out through the universal revelation that is God’s grace. He states that although “The salvation of the individual requires that the person respond to divine revelation with an act of supernatural faith, and in some real sense this faith must be ultimately directed to Christ as

the mediator of salvation,” there is nothing denying the possibility of declaring that “a faith which is creative of salvation among non-Christians...is made possible and is based upon the supernatural grace of the Spirit.”

This view of faith and the likelihood of salvation within those religions other than Christianity can be seen as inclusive and visionary. If others follow and respond to God’s call, yet are settled in institutional practices and beliefs not considered Christian, they are still “in spiritual communion with the church, which is the sacramental sign of the life of Christ’s grace which they share without knowing its source.” Francis A. Sullivan summarizes Rahner’s stance on the particularities of salvation within non-Christian religions in the following words:

Rahner insists that...until non-Christians become so convinced of their obligation to accept Christianity that it would be a mortal sin for them not to do so, their own religion continues to be the way in which God must intend that they express their relationship with him and arrive at their salvation. Needless to say, he agrees with Vatican II in presuming that those who have heard the Christian message and have not yet accepted it are in good faith, and are not guilty of sin in remaining in their own religion. From this it follows that the non-Christian religions must remain, under God’s providence, legitimate ways of salvation for the majority of the world’s people.

This suggests that, just as grace is abounding in the eyes of the divine and absolute mystery, salvation, although doctrinally much more complex, is again disseminated vicariously through distinct belief systems. This predicament of salvation outside of the Church eludes many scholars and faithful alike, creating perfect conditions for inflamed attitudes and heart-wrenching emotions. Moreover, this situation demonstrates evidence that unfinished work exists in this area of soteriological methodology. Nevertheless, Rahner explores various avenues of explication through the complex nature of the divine Godhead, who is in relationship with the Son and the infiltrating Spirit, and who offers true hope in this seemingly inimical world.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to answer several questions, most of which can be annotated into a few points. Firstly, our relationship with the divine is more real and alive than we could have ever imagined; Rahner’s introduction of the transcendental element within theological discourse proposes an ideal that “transcends” all others. He provides a framework for a relationship so deep that we must be aware constantly of the excessive love that God gives unselfishly in “self-donation.” We are intricately connected to the divine, constantly surrounded by him through our categorical and realized actions within the everyday world.

We are also aware that salvation, like grace, flows circularly. While initially we are introduced to the Word through the self-revelatory nature of God’s gift, we respond to it and are empowered by it to offer διακονία to the entire world. We make use of God’s grace in setting examples for our neighbors, no matter what color, race, creed, or nationality. We become service; we embody Christ. We give back to that which has given us foundation, meaning, and patience.

Finally, we are reminded that we have to be honest and receptive of our inner fragility and inadequacy. Without this specific intra-realization, nothing we have learned above could be absorbed for the greater good of humanity and divinity. As the illustrious German Jesuit once wrote, “You [Jesus] are yesterday, today, and in eternity, because Your life cannot have been lost before God. You are the infinite question in which I and my dying life

40 Rahner, Foundations of Christian Faith, 316.
participate, namely, human being.”\textsuperscript{42} Let us all be aware of ourselves and all that we have been given, in order that we can pay tribute and attention to others in the example that we have been chosen to uphold.